Renegade Press

PRESENTS

WORD SMITH

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2 OCT

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

"Outside of a dog
A book is a man's best friend.
Inside a dog
It's too dark to read."
Groucho Marx

I saw this quote at the Burbank Post Office. The question remains, how many people feel that reading is a "best friend"? I noticed that American television is, strangely enough, trying to promote reading through their presentation of "Great American Plays" (I watched Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*) followed by a very brief statement by an actor from the play telling the audience of other great books they can read if they enjoyed what was just presented. But can a generation raised on "the tube" really be sold on the joys of reading? After all, it takes much more involvement on the reader's part than when he watches TV. So, where do you make the leap from a passive viewer of stories that unfold for your benefit to the unraveller of descriptive phrases on the printed page? It seems to me that the medium you hold in your hands-comic books-might be a good place to start. *Wordsmith* is a good example of how to bridge the gap, and every comic company has at least one example of literate comic book storytelling.
Now, if you bought this book, I am preaching to the converted. But I am sure that every one of you has at least one friend who loves *Miami Vice* or *Hill Street Blues* but wouldn't be caught dead reading a book, particularly a comic book. So introduce them. Do you have a friend who enjoys stories with strong female characters? Why not show her a complete *Ms. Tree* story such as the "Runaway" story in issues 16 and 17? Do you have a friend who is fascinated with the power struggles of politics? Show him a couple of issues of *Cerebus*. Do you have friends who look more at home at a "Frankie Goes to Hollywood" concert than a comicon? How about lending them copies of *Love and Rockets*? There are all kinds of books they can be introduced to from there. Whatever you do, don't be afraid to stretch yourself a bit. Don't be discouraged by words you don't know (that's what dictionaries are for) or if it takes you a while to read and understand what you're reading. The beauty of reading is that you can always pick it up and enjoy it again and again. "Instant replay" at any time. You are in control of who you are and what you do, so why limit what that can be?

Next month: A little something about a new series coming in February-*Maxwell Mouse Follies*-and a one-shot by Jerry Siegel and Valentino-*(It's a) Crime Comics*. Plus, to premiere in March, an exciting new series from Dan Day called *The Cases of Sherlock Holmes*, a wonderful new series from Michael Cherkas (who did the Unique Stories feature, Dick Mallot) and Larry Hancock, called *The Silent Invasion*, and the revival of *Unique Stories!* Be here!

Deni

WORD SMITH

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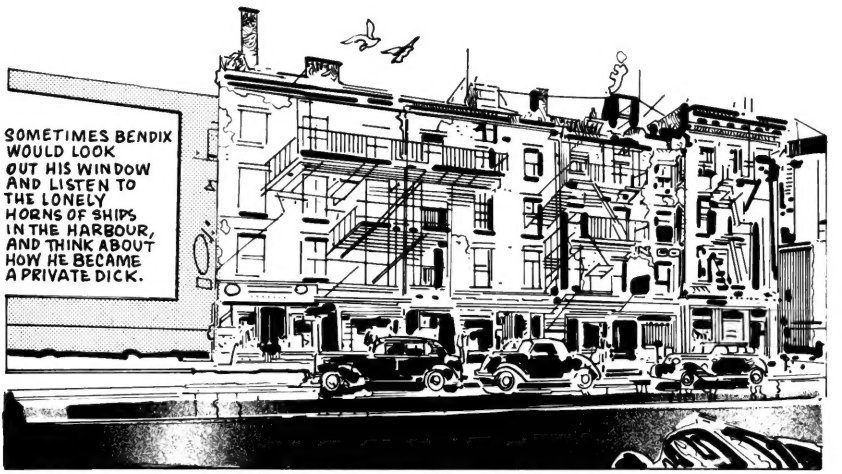
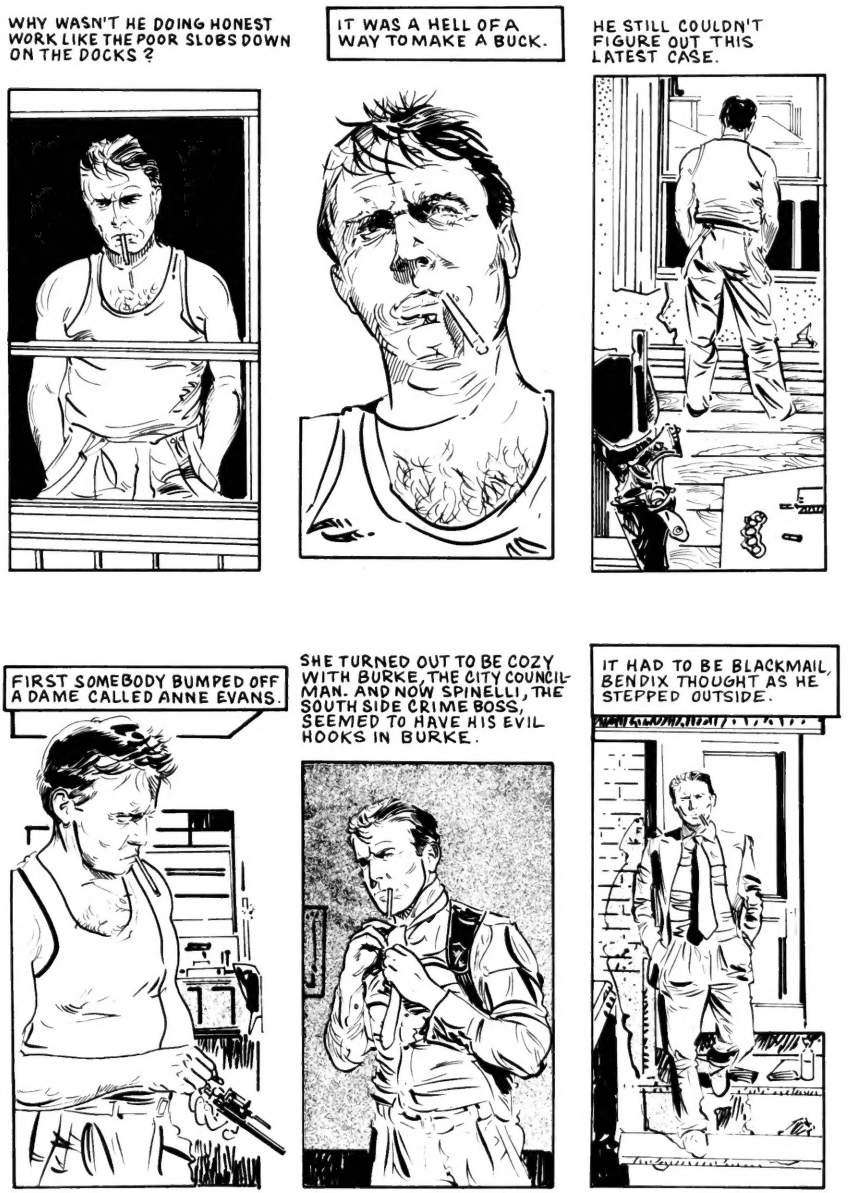
A DASH OF CHAOS - A PINCH OF ORDER.

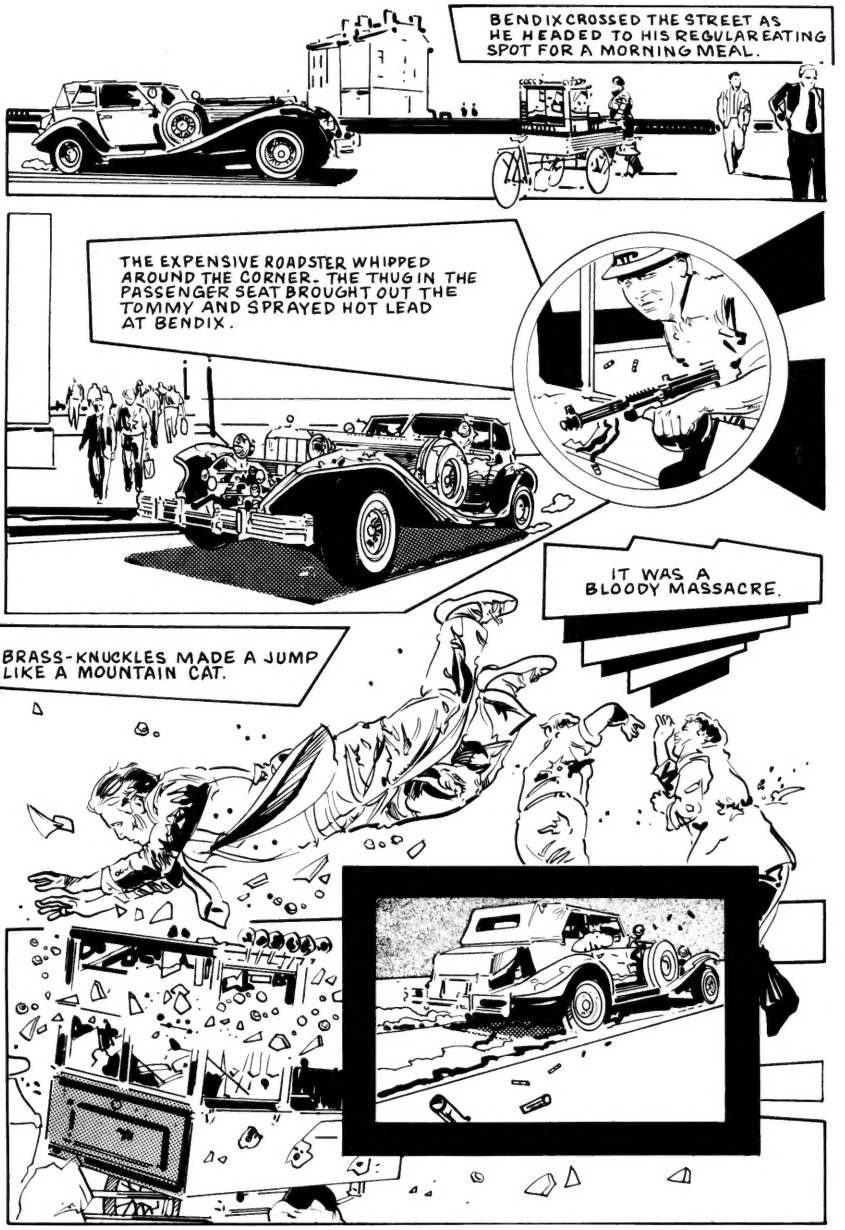
BRASS-KNUCKLES BENDIX WOKE TO THE CRY OF GULLS THE NEXT MORNING

HIS PLACE WAS IN SOUTH BROOKLYN, NEAR THE WHARFS


SOMETIMES BENDIX WOULD LOOK OUT HIS WINDOW AND LISTEN TO THE LONELY HORNS OF SHIPS IN THE HARBOUR, AND THINK ABOUT HOW HE BECAME A PRIVATE DICK.

STORY - DAVE DARRIGO LETTERS LES TAYLOR ART - R.G. TAYLOR


WHY WASN'T HE DOING HONEST WORK LIKE THE POOR SLOBS DOWN ON THE DOCKS ?
IT WAS A HELL OF A WAY TO MAKE A BUCK.
HE STILL COULDN'T FIGURE OUT THIS LATEST CASE.
FIRST SOMEBODY BUMPED OFF A DAME CALLED ANNE EVANS.
SHE TURNED OUT TO BE COZY WITH BURKE, THE CITY COUNCIL-MAN. AND NOW SPINELLI, THE SOUTH SIDE CRIME BOSS, SEEMED TO HAVE HIS EVIL HOOKS IN BURKE.
IT HAD TO BE BLACKMAIL, BENDIX THOUGHT AS HE STEPPED OUTSIDE.

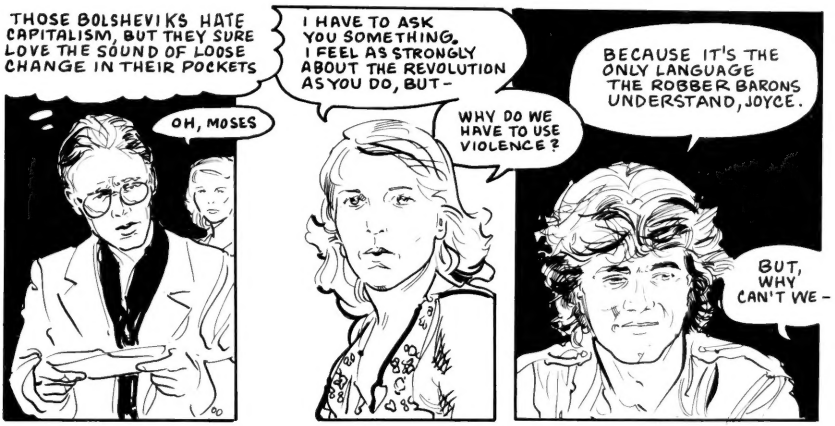

BENDIX CROSSED THE STREET AS HE HEADED TO HIS REGULAR EATING SPOT FOR A MORNING MEAL.
THE EXPENSIVE ROADSTER WHIPPED AROUND THE CORNER. THE THUG IN THE PASSENGER SEAT BROUGHT OUT THE TOMMY AND SPRAYED HOT LEAD AT BENDIX.
IT WAS A BLOODY MASSACRE.
BRASS-KNUCKLES MADE A JUMP LIKE A MOUNTAIN CAT.

BENDIX'S SHARPSHOOTER'S EYE TOOK STEADY AIM AND HE PULLED THE TRIGGER TWICE. THE SLUGS BLEW OUT THE ROADSTER'S REAR TIRE AND SENT THE CAR OUT OF CONTROL, SMASHING INTO A FIRE PLUG.
RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES
THE DRIVER TRIED TO FLEE ...
BUT HE WAS CARELESS.

HE HAD RUN INTO THE PATH OF A CAR AND BEEN HIT. HIS BODY FLEW INTO THE AIR LIKE A... LIKE A WHAT? ...LIKE A... SACK OF POTATOES? NO. LIKE A... GEEZ, THESE METAPHORS CAN REALLY SLOW YOU DOWN.
I BETTER GET DRESSED FOR THE TRIP DOWNTOWN.
I WALKED TO THE NEAREST "EL" STATION.
I HOPE I GET THAT CHECK TODAY
THERE'S LESS THAN $100.00 IN MY ACCOUNT. I'VE GOT TO SPEND MORE TIME GOING OUT TO COLLECT WHAT I'M OWED.
LOOK AT THAT STUPID AD.
BOY, I'M REALLY IN THE WRONG BUSINESS
DON'T BE A BALDY!
use
PRENEY'S HAIR TONIC
IT WILL PRESERVE EVERY PRECIOUS HAIR ON YOUR HEAD
MY FIRST STOP WAS AT THE OFFICE OF THREE-STAR PUBLICATIONS ON LEXINGTON.

MALACHI JACOBS WAS THE EDITOR
YEAH, I'VE GOT YOUR CHECK.
HAVE YOU GOT ANY 'OVERNIGHT JOBS' FOR ME?
NAW, I DON'T USE STORIES FROM 'DEADLINE CHASERS.'
I'D RATHER GO INTO MY INVENTORY. HERE'S YOUR CHECK.
HE CAN BE A REAL SCROOGE WHEN HE WANTS TO BE.
MY LAST STOP WAS MY BANK. I STOOD IN LINE IN FRONT OF TWO WOMEN AND OVERHEARD THEIR CONVERSATION.
BUSINESS AT MY PARLOUR HAS REALLY TAKEN A DIP. YOU'D THINK WOMEN WOULD STILL WANT TO LOOK GOOD... EVEN IN A DEPRESSION.
I FIND THAT NO-ONE TAKES PRIDE IN THEIR APPEARANCE ANYMORE.

"IT JUST GETS WORSE AND WORSE. HEAVEN KNOWS WHERE IT WILL END UP SOME DAY."
SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF OUR NEW HOME, CLAY?
NICE
MY POET FRIEND, MOSES COHEN, HAD INVITED ME TO SEE THE NEW, LARGER QUARTERS FOR THE WEEKLY GATHERING OF LOCAL COMMUNISM SUPPORTERS.
CARE TO READ MY POEMS. ONLY 25¢
UH... OKAY
YOU'LL LIKE HIS POEMS. IT'S WORTH THE MONEY
I HOPE SO. I COULD HAVE BOUGHT A GOOD USED BOOK OF POETRY FOR THE SAME PRICE
Oo.

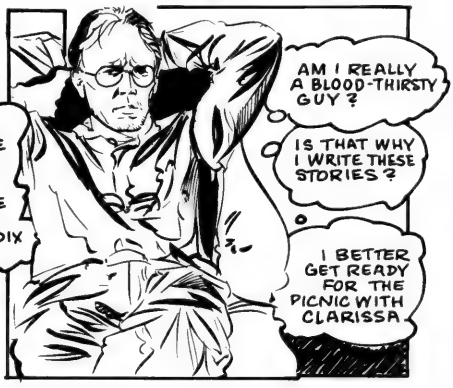

THOSE BOLSHEVIKS HATE CAPITALISM, BUT THEY SURE LOVE THE SOUND OF LOOSE CHANGE IN THEIR POCKETS
OH, MOSES
I HAVE TO ASK YOU SOMETHING. I FEEL AS STRONGLY ABOUT THE REVOLUTION AS YOU DO, BUT-
WHY DO WE HAVE TO USE VIOLENCE?
BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY LANGUAGE THE ROBBER BARONS UNDERSTAND, JOYCE.
BUT, WHY CAN'T WE-

LATER, AFTER MOSES HAD FINISHED LECTURING JOYCE, WE SAT AND TALKED.
SO, WHAT KIND OF STORY ARE YOU WORKING ON RIGHT NOW, CLAY?
ARE YOU REALLY INTERESTED? OR ARE YOU JUST MAKING CONVERSATION?

I MAY NOT READ ALL YOUR STORIES, BUT I'M ALWAYS INTERESTED.
IT'S A PRIVATE EYE STORY.
I'VE READ SOME OF THOSE.
I ENJOYED THEM. BUT THE HERO ALWAYS GETS ON A CASE TO BRING ORDER TO THE WORLD, AND YET BY THE END OF THE STORY-
THE CITY LIES IN RUINS. THAT'S A CONTRADICTION, DON'T YOU THINK?
UHHH..

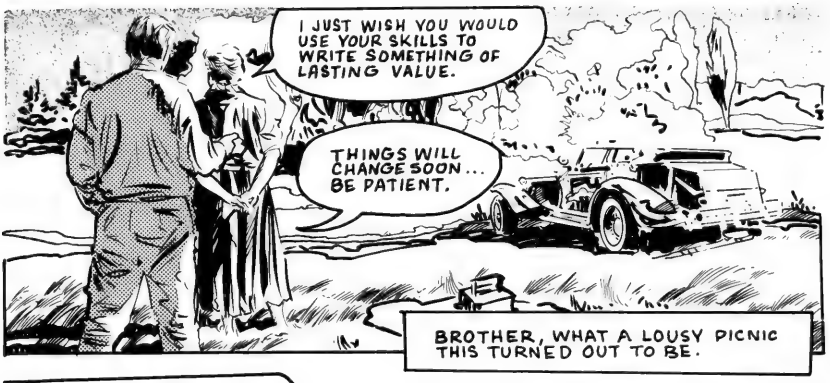
I WATCHED A LAZY SUN COME UP OVER THE CITY THE NEXT MORNING.

I HAD SLEPT FITFULLY THAT NIGHT, HAUNTED BY THE QUESTIONS MOSES HAD PUT TO ME AT THE PARTY. I WAS STILL STRUGGLING FOR AN ANSWER.

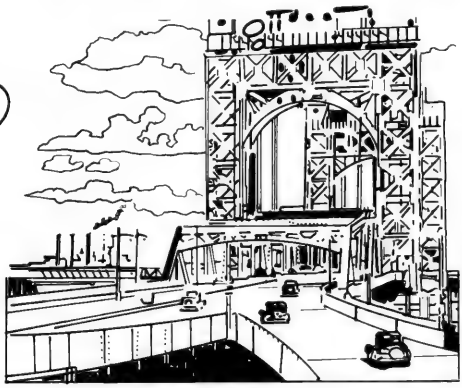


CLARISSA DROVE US OUT TO LONG ISLAND IN HER ROADSTER FOR THE PICNIC. WE FOUND A NICE SPOT. UNFORTUNATELY, OUR DISPOSITIONS WEREN'T AS SUNNY AS THE DAY.
CLARISSA WAS FROM THE RICH MIDDLETON FAMILY - THE MAYFLOWER MIDDLETONS. SOMETIMES SHE BORED ME WITH HER IDLE CHATTER.
AND SO I TOLD MOTHER- OH, THESE FLIES!
PEOPLE ARE STARVING AND SHE CUTS THE CRUST OFF HER BREAD
EVER SINCE THE LINDBERGH KIDNAPPING MY FATHER IS BLAH CONSTANTLY LOOKING BLAH BLAH OVER HIS SHOULDER BLAH, BLAH, BLAH....
MAYBE I SHOULD RE-WRITE THAT MASSACRE SCENE. YEAH, I THINK I SHOULD. LET'S SEE... INSTEAD OF A TOMMY-GUN IN A CAR I COULD HAVE THE HOODS...

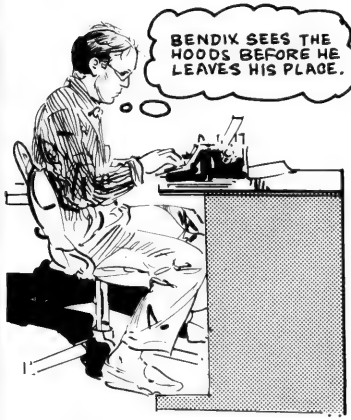
CLAY, ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?
I'M SORRY, I WAS -
YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT ONE OF YOUR RIDICULOUS STORIES AGAIN.
AS USUAL
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND -
- THAT A WRITER DOESN'T JUST WORK AT A TYPEWRITER. HE DOES IT IN HIS BRAIN.
AND YOU HAVE A STRANGE BRAIN, CLAY WASHBURN. HERE WE ARE - SURROUNDED BY THE BEAUTY OF NATURE - AND ALL YOU THINK ABOUT ARE DIME NOVEL HEROES!
IT'S NOT EASY TO SHUT OFF YOUR BRAIN, CLARISSA.


I JUST WISH YOU WOULD USE YOUR SKILLS TO WRITE SOMETHING OF LASTING VALUE.
THINGS WILL CHANGE SOON... BE PATIENT.
BROTHER, WHAT A LOUSY PICNIC THIS TURNED OUT TO BE.

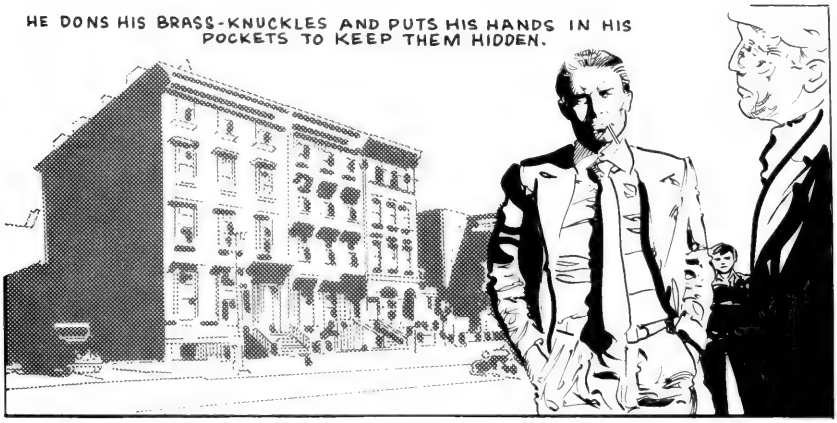
OH! ALL THE PATIENCE THAT I HAVE LEFT HAS BEEN USED UP ON THESE DAMN FLIES!
DID SHE SAY DAMN?



I GOT BACK TO WORK ON THE BRASS-KNUCKLES BENDIX STORY AS SOON AS I GOT HOME.


BENDIX SEES THE HOODS BEFORE HE LEAVES HIS PLACE.

HE DONS HIS BRASS-KNUCKLES AND PUTS HIS HANDS IN HIS POCKETS TO KEEP THEM HIDDEN.



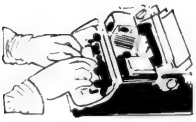
THE THUGS MOVE IN AND DISARM HIM.

THEY STRONG-ARM HIM INTO A NEARBY ALLEY IN ORDER TO WORK HIM OVER AND TELL HIM TO DROP THE CASE.

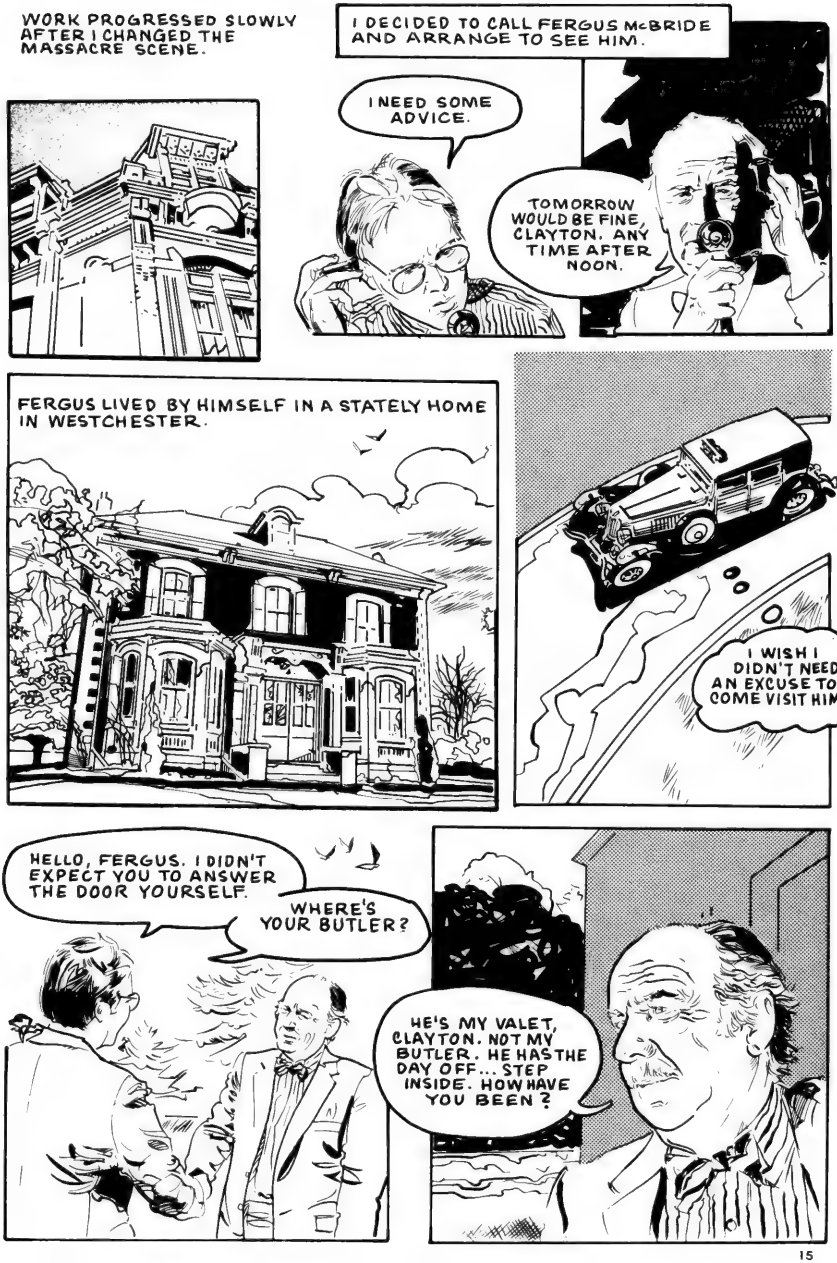
Bendix feigned a struggle as the two muscle-boys pulled him into the alley. His hands were clenched in his pocket and he was ready to let loose with his famous brass-knuckles.

"You're pokin' your nose where it don't belong, shamus," one of the toughs growled.

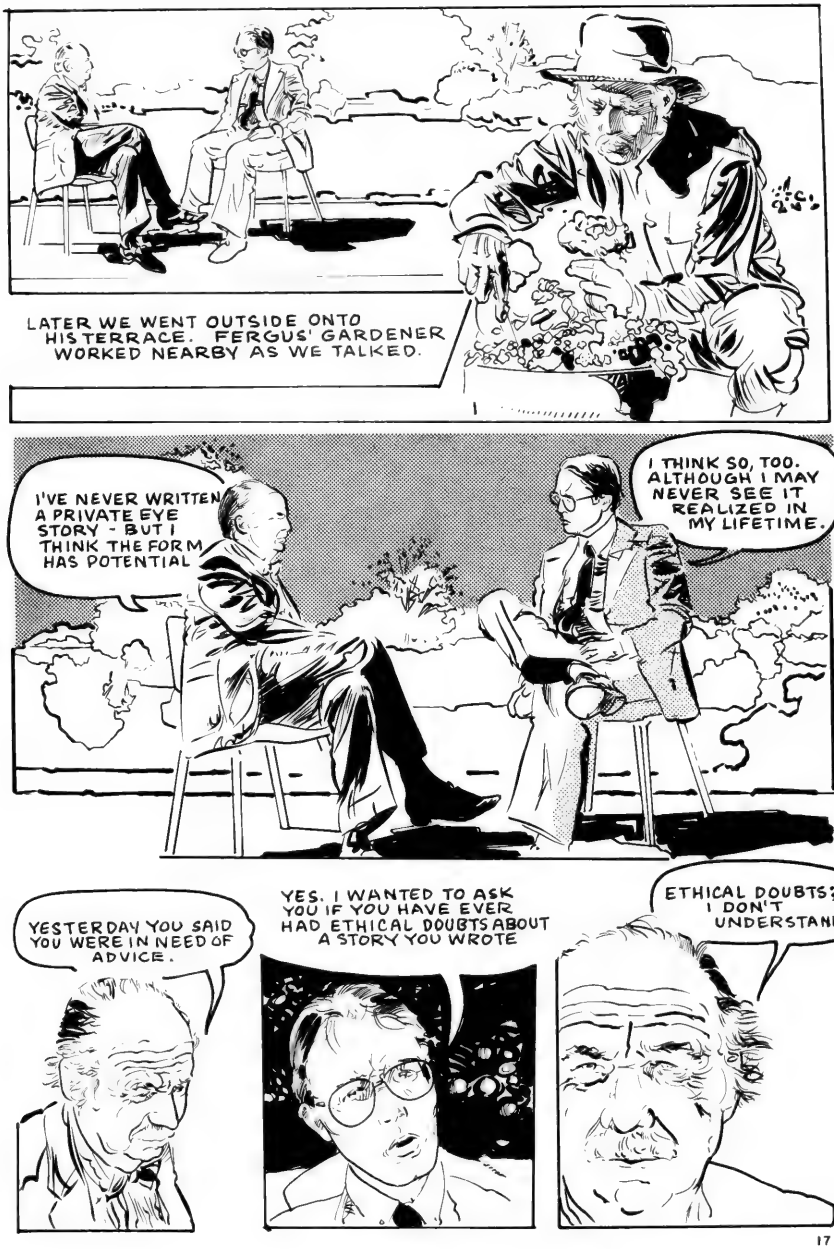
"Yeah," the other hood added. "And we're going to bust that nose so it don't poke no more."



"Can't we talk this over, gents?" Bendix asked as they jostled him.
"Ha!" one of the gorilles-in-pants blurted. "Forget it, gumshoe!" Then Bendix brought his brass-knuckled fist into the open.
"Okay" Bendix said. "I'll let my knucks talk for me."
Bendix pounded them brutally –
laughing aloud as they fell.
"You guys have been bustin' noses all your lives," Bendix said. "Now it's time for you goons to get a load of what you've been dishing out."
Bendix brought his knee up into the face of the younger gorilla. Blood gushed from the tough's flattened nose.
Bendix stood victorious over the fallen hoods. "Somebody sent you boys to give me a message," Bendix said. "I'm bettin' Spinelli was the one."


WORK PROGRESSED SLOWLY AFTER I CHANGED THE MASSACRE SCENE.
I DECIDED TO CALL FERGUS McBRIDE AND ARRANGE TO SEE HIM.
I NEED SOME ADVICE.
TOMORROW WOULD BE FINE, CLAYTON. ANY TIME AFTER NOON.
FERGUS LIVED BY HIMSELF IN A STATELY HOME IN WESTCHESTER.
I WISH I DIDN'T NEED AN EXCUSE TO COME VISIT HIM
HELLO, FERGUS. I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO ANSWER THE DOOR YOURSELF.
WHERE'S YOUR BUTLER?
HE'S MY VALET, CLAYTON. NOT MY BUTLER. HE HAS THE DAY OFF... STEP INSIDE. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?

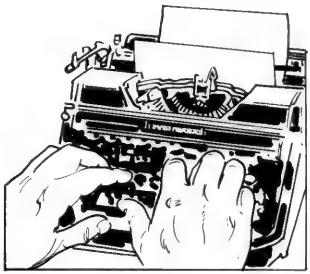
WE WENT INTO FERGUS' GIANT STUDY
FERGUS WAS A RETIRED PULP WRITER WHO NOW WROTE POPULAR HARDCOVER MURDER MYSTERIES. HE KNEW ALL THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE.
IS THIS YOUR LATEST MANUSCRIPT?
YES. I JUST FINISHED IT.
MURDER ON THE HIGH SEAS
I ENVY YOU, FERGUS. I WISH I COULD BREAK OUT OF THE DIME NOVEL RUT.
WE'RE BOTH WRITING TO FORMULAS, CLAYTON.... MINE IS JUST A LITTLE MORE PRESTIGIOUS THAN YOURS.
YET - THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WOULD RATHER SIT ON A FLAG-POLE THAN ADMIT MY WORK COULD HAVE VALUE.


LATER WE WENT OUTSIDE ONTO HIS TERRACE. FERGUS' GARDENER WORKED NEARBY AS WE TALKED.
I'VE NEVER WRITTEN A PRIVATE EYE STORY - BUT I THINK THE FORM HAS POTENTIAL
I THINK SO, TOO. ALTHOUGH I MAY NEVER SEE IT REALIZED IN MY LIFETIME.
YESTERDAY YOU SAID YOU WERE IN NEED OF ADVICE.
YES. I WANTED TO ASK YOU IF YOU HAVE EVER HAD ETHICAL DOUBTS ABOUT A STORY YOU WROTE
ETHICAL DOUBTS? I DON'T UNDERSTAND

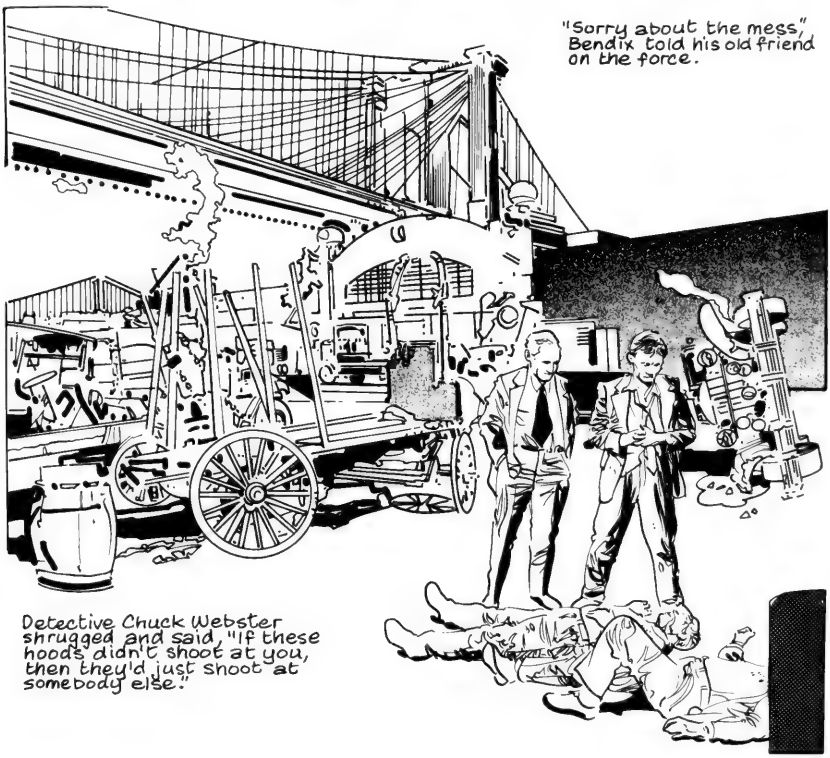
I TOLD FERGUS ABOUT MOSES' QUESTION AND HOW I WAS SEARCHING FOR AN ANSWER TO IT.
YOUR ANSWER WON'T BE FOUND IN LOGIC, MY BOY. THERE IS NOTHING LOGICAL ABOUT POPULAR FICTION. PEOPLE READ - AND WRITE - THESE STORIES ON PRIMITIVE INSTINCT.
YOU MUST LEARN TO WEAR BLINKERS IN YOUR MIND. AND JUST LIKE A HORSE, YOU HAVE TO LOOK STRAIGHT AHEAD AND FOLLOW THE PATH THAT YOUR STORY REVEALS.
I'VE TOLD YOU MY 'RECIPE FOR NEWS-STAND SOUP,' HAVEN'T I ?
UHHH... NO.
YOU NEED A QUART OF VIOLENCE; A GLASS OF SENTIMENT.
A TABLESPOON OF LOGIC. A DASH OF CHAOS; AND A PINCH OF ORDER
LATER.
THE BOY HAS A GOOD HEAD ON HIS SHOULDERS.
BUT HE THINKS TOO MUCH.

I'D SPENT TEN BUCKS IN CAB FARES, BUT THE TALK WITH FERGUS HAD BEEN WORTH IT.

The street was a disaster zone, seemingly as in the aftermath of a tornado. Bendix holstered his revolver and waited for the cops to arrive.



"Sorry about the mess," Bendix told his old friend on the force.



Detective Chuck Webster shrugged and said, "If these hoods didn't shoot at you, then they'd just shoot at somebody else."

LATER THAT DAY
HELLO, MRS. MIDDLETON. IS CLARISSA THERE?
NO. SHE'S OUT SHOPPING FOR A NEW DRESS. SHE'S GOING TO THE THEATRE TONIGHT.
I DON'T BELIEVE YOU KNOW HER DATE. HE'S A YOUNG MAN WHO IS RELATED TO THE MORGAN FAMILY.
DAMN, WOMEN!
I'M JUST WASTING MY BREATH WHEN I ASK HER TO BE PATIENT WITH ME.
ENJOY THE SHOW, CLARISSA.
I SAT AROUND FOR A COUPLE OF HOURS, THEN I DECIDED TO GO OVER TO HARLEM.

I TOLD THE CABBIE TO DRIVE AROUND. HE KNEW WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR.

H'LO, SHIEK

UHH... HOW MUCH?

ONLY FIFTEEN, HONEY.
WELL...
HOW 'BOUT TWELVE?

WHERE YOU GOING?
FORGET IT.

MAYBE I HAD TO WRITE MY STORIES WITH PRIMITIVE INSTINCT....

BUT I DIDN'T HAVE TO LIVE MY LIFE THAT WAY.

Long Live The Pulps!

by David Darrigo.

Part Two.

Last issue, in Part One of this mini-primer, we looked at the state of popular fiction in the time of Clay Washburn, the Wordsmith. Clay is a writer for pulp magazines, but the word 'pulp' has become a generic term. At the risk of offending any literature professors reading this I would venture to say that the term could be applied to many of 'the classics'.

Are these writers, or these works of popular fiction, really that far removed from a writer like Clay? Namely: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey in ancient Greece. The heroic poems of Beowulf and Parzival. The Arabian Nights. The medieval romances of Arthur and the Round Table in England; of Charlemagne and his Paladins in France; of Roderigo, the Cid in Spain. The 'rogue' literature of Dekker and Greene in the times of Queen Elizabeth. Sir Walter Scott. Alexander Dumas. James Fenimore Cooper.

I believe these writers and these works are direct antecedents to the Wordsmith.

When you read the term 'pulp fiction' in a critique or review you know that the writer is referring to two things: formula and commerciality. This term is often used in a derogatory manner — much in the same way the term 'comic book' is used. How many film reviews have you read where the writer says the movie "has a plot that's pure pulp." Or that the characters are "as two dimensional as a comic book."

The formulas of popular fiction vary according to genre and gender. Males and females expect different thrills from their fiction. But, the common elements for all such stories are: stereotypes, romance, conflict and happy endings. Those are the bare bones — and like bare bones anywhere they aren't pretty. But, it's important that you see these empty elements this way because it's the way the Wordsmith sees them when he creates his stories. The 'fleshing-out' of the story is where the fun comes in.

Formula fiction doesn't work for everyone. It may not be Art, but it can't be dismissed. It is part of our culture and worthy of our study. I don't think I would be out of line if I paraphrased a fellow Canadian and said that "the Formula is the Message."

Formulas have to be packaged, and that's where commerciality comes in.

For male-oriented pulps that meant two things: first, a hero. Second, a time or place that he could act heroic in.

The action genres that the pulps chose were (at least through the 1920's) historical in nature. Knights, pirates, cowboys, Foreign Legionaires, Mounties, World War One fighter pilots — these figures were the staples.

The genres in the 1930's became either, (a) more contemporary (e.g., the crime-fighter or gang-buster pulps like the Shadow and G-Men etc.) or (b) fantastic (e.g., Doc Savage. Or G-8, which was a cross-breed of fantastic horror and fighter pilot) or (c) 'spicy'. The spicy pulps were an attempt to boost sales through partial nudity and implied sex. (They were very pale compared to today's 'adult' westerns.)

War pulps, especially air war magazines, also flourished. During the mid-30's the bi-planes on the covers of the air war pulps turned into sleek, mono-plane fighters as advances in aviation were made. And from 1939 to 1941 American men vicariously fought the Nazis in pulps like R.A.F. Aces. Pulp publishers were often put in the yellow journalism school of thought — i.e., "If there's no war, we'll make one!" But, have we really changed since then? The success of 'Rambo' seems to bear this out.

No matter where you looked — no matter how odd or eccentric the type of pulp it was — every story had to have a strong hero as the central focus and a plot that required the hero to fight for truth or justice. (Or, in the case of Operator #5, to fight for 'the American Way' against countless invading armies.)

This form of packaging of the formulas cuts to the heart of the pulps. Pulp publishers knew their audience. They knew that the majority of their readers weren't of the wealthier classes because these people preferred reading material such as books or 'slick' magazines. The pulps were low-brow and anyone from a bourgeois background caught reading a pulp (and thousands did) was laughed at.

Once the pulp era ended popular fiction for men did not suffer, of course. Writers like Mickey Spillane, Ian Fleming, John D. MacDonald, Donald Hamilton, Brett Halliday, Edward S. Aarons and Alistair MacLean have ably carried the banner into the paperback era.

During the '60's the paperback industry brought back the pulps. Why it did so is anybody's guess. Was it nostalgia exploitation? Sincere homage to past masters? Or maybe they just had a void to fill for ravenous readers?

The Shadow, who was re-incarnated by at least four different publishers, and Doc Savage, who is still in print and staving off cancellation threats, as well as the Spider and G-8, both of whom have been recently reprinted again, were among the many pulp heroes who were exhumed by the paperback industry.

But, unknown to the paperback people, they would soon have their own 'pulp era'.

During the '70's — with the introduction of the Executioner — the paperback industry got a taste of pulp fever.

Mafia-busters and super-vigilantes and just plain odd-ball heroes (Anyone remember the half-breed Indian super-spy called John Eagle?) began to dominate the stands. The Destroyer. The Death Merchant. The Penetrator. These and countless other series characters were popping up everywhere. The publishers carefully numbered each edition so you could keep track of your collection. (A practice that is still in effect today)

Pinnacle Books of California had the most popular 'stable' of heroes and one could easily draw parallels between it and the Street and Smith stable in the '30's. It was the house that set the standards that its competitors followed.

Also in the '70's Byron Preiss' Weird Heroes series deliberately set out to capture the flavor of the pulps with short, illustrated stories, but it failed to catch on.

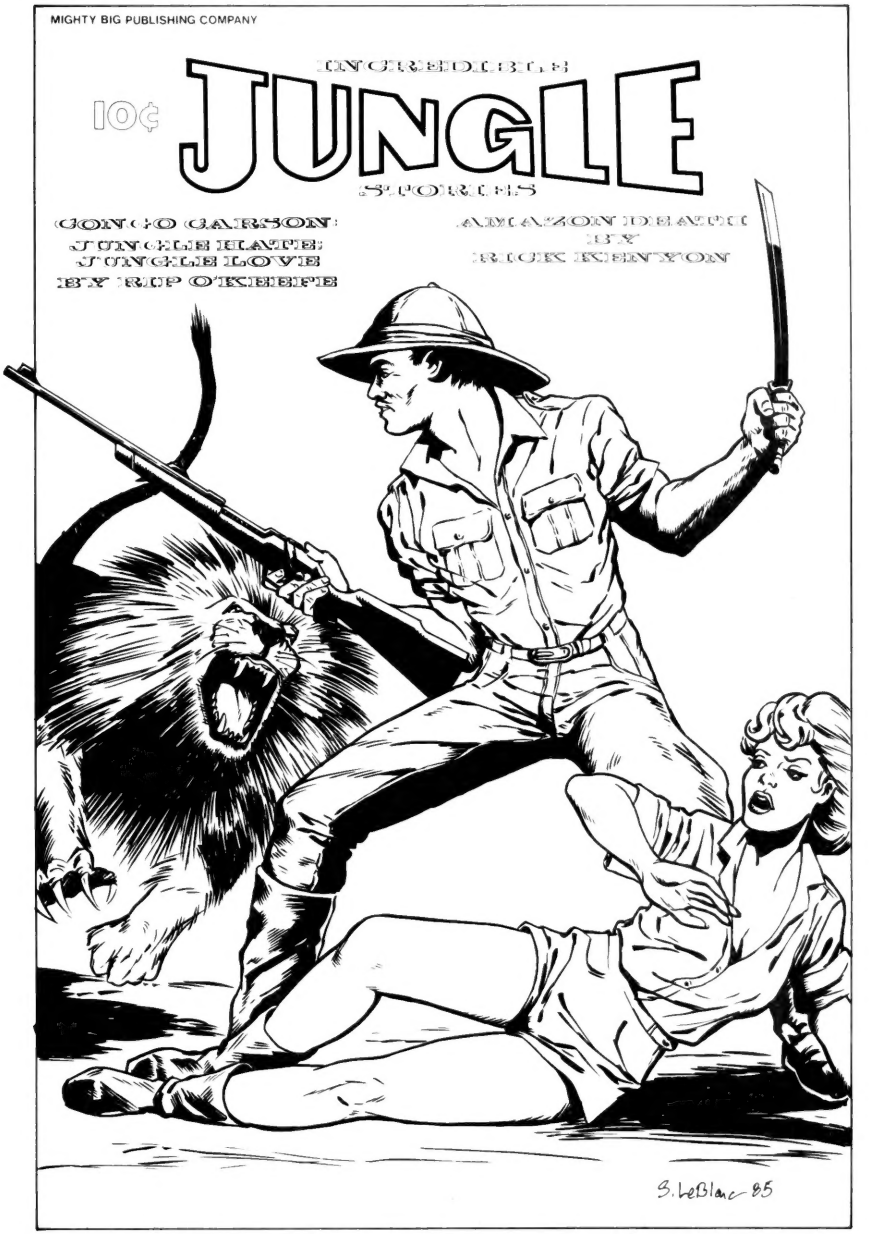
Now, don't let me convince you that the pulps **aren't** dead. They certainly are. There's a big difference between 'pulp fiction', as a generic term, and fiction that was really published in a pulp magazine.

Remember that the pulps were at their height 50 years ago. That's B.TV. (Before Television) and Pre-H-Bomb. As Don Hutchison says in his first 'Pulp File' column — "perhaps you had to be there."

Perhaps. But maybe we can work around that obstacle. I hope so.

Please address your letters to: Pulp Fever. c/o Dragon Lady Comic Shop. 200 Queen St. West. Toronto, Ontario. Canada. M5V 1Z2.

PULP PIN-UP



BY STEVE LEBLANC

THE PULP FILE

by Don Hutchison

"It's A Jungle Out There!"

Golden Fleece. South Sea Stories. Black Mask. Super Science Stories. Hollywood Detective. Magic Carpet. Doc Savage. Railroad Stories. The Spider. Northwest Romances. Famous Fantastic Mysteries. Jungle Stories. Western Raiders. Zeppelin Stories... the roll call is endless. They were the pulps. By definition they were magazines of popular fiction handling such staples as adventure, action and romance. Between their birth in the first years of this century and their demise in the early fifties they represented the greatest explosion of mass entertainment by way of the printed word that a thrill-seeking public ever experienced.

Variety was infinite. There were detective pulps, science-fiction pulps, sports pulps, romance pulps, gang war pulps, horror pulps, spicy mystery pulps, jungle and desert adventure pulps. There were straight aviation pulps, with names like Daredevil Aces and Sky Fighters as well as macabre variants of the same theme like G-8 and his Battle Aces, which routinely ladled out titles like; 'Squadron of Corpses', 'the Headless Staffel' and 'Scourge of the Sky Beast'.

From railroad yarns to pirate stories, from the center of the earth to the farthest reaches of the universe, the gaudy, gory, glorious pulp magazines delivered on their promise: something for everyone.

How to explain the euphoria of the pulps? Perhaps you had to be there. You had to be young —at least in spirit. You had to be poor (most people were). You had to be part of that troubled, yet more innocent era.

In September of 1962 Playboy magazine published an article by Charles Beaumont which stands as an epitaph for that entire breed of magazines whose only aim was to entertain.

"What were the pulps?" Beaumont wrote. "Cheaply printed, luridly illustrated, sensationally written magazines of fiction aimed at the lower and lower-middle classes... Were they any good?... No. They were great!"

It appears that millions of readers agreed. In the pulp heyday of the 1930's, Depression-weary readers, drunk on exotic adventure, poured mountains of dimes across newsstand counters. Whole forests were levelled to supply their insatiable demand for dreams that mere pennies could buy. And, of course, the word merchants were there to make sure that that demand never exceeded supply.

At a penny a word — sometimes more, but often less — you had to sell a lot of words to make a living. Even so, a few pulp scriveners did well. In the depths of the Great Depression it was rumoured that a fictioneer named Frederick Faust (a.k.a., Max Brand) earned $80,000 a year on pulp writing alone. He wound up living like a Medici in a castle in Italy, surrounded by a retinue of servants.

It was a literary Gold Rush, but for the few who struck pay dirt (such as Hammett, Burroughs, Gardner) hundreds of others found the panning tough.

Frank Gruber confided: "There were in existence, at this time, some 150 pulp magazines, solidly established. A vast market for stories. But these were still Depression Days and the competition was fierce. It was a literary jungle and every writer was a tiger. You had to be brash, you had to be tough, you had to claw your way into the jungle and fight for your life every minute you were in it. There were more writers than there were magazines. All were hungry writers."

The law of this particular jungle was that in order to survive you had to produce. A pulp writer's stint had to be at least 2,000 to 3,000 finished words each day. In order to meet his commitments on **the Shadow**, author Walter Gibson told of how he was obliged to increase this daily allotment to 5,000 words or more each day. Surprisingly, he found that once he geared for that pace he found that instead of being exhausted by 5,000 words he was just reaching his peak. He made 10,000 words a day his goal and he found that he could achieve it. Some Shadow novels were completely written in four days, starting early Monday morning and finishing late Thursday evening. On those occasions he averaged 15,000 words a day, a pace of four to five typewritten pages an hour for 12 to 15 hours.

"By living, thinking, even dreaming the story in one continued process," Gibson revealed, "ideas came faster and faster. Sometimes the typewriter keys would fly so fast that I wondered if my fingers could keep up with them. And at the finish of the story I often had to take a few days off as my fingertips were too sore to begin work on the next book."

Storytellers have always existed since the first printed word. From Dumas and Dickens through to writers like Edgar Wallace who could, and did, churn out a novel a week and in between find the time to dash off a play and a few short stories. But never before and never again did there exist a market for wordsmiths like that of the fabulous pulps.

Each month brightly-colored covers shrilled the names of hundreds of writers, all as familiar to readers as household brands. To their fans, they were names that crackled with the electric thrill of lightning: Carroll John Daly. H. Bedford Jones. Cornell Woolrich. Theodore Tinsley. Walt Coburn. Robert E. Howard. A. Merritt. Robert J. Hogan. Edmond Hamilton. Hugh B. Cave. Talbot Mundy. Harold Lamb. Johnston McCulley, and legions of others.

When the pulps died of neglect in 1953, it was truly the end of an era. Some of the old-timers graduated into the 'slicks' or family magazines. Others found work in paperbacks and comic books, or drifted out to Hollywood to work in movies and TV. Ironically, they were fueling the very mediums that had killed the pulps by imitation — the sincerest form of flattery.

In future Pulp Files I plan to write about some of the great wordsmiths whose work lives on in the memories of readers. And, of course, whose names once beckoned to us on the eye-searing, enameled covers of those impossibly lurid, extravagantly entertaining magazines we call, the Pulps!